# Four Lives of Typical Americans

*A Group Review. By JUDGE WILLARD BARTLETT.*

GEORGE WASHINGTON. By William Roscoe Thayer. Houghton Mifflin Company.

JOHN BURROUGHS TALKS. His reminiscences and comments as reported by Clifton Johnson. Houghton Mifflin Company.

ALL IN A LIFETIME. By Henry Morgenthau in collaboration with French Strother. Doubleday, Page & Co.

MY LIFE AND WORK. By Henry Ford in collaboration with Samuel Crowther. Doubleday, Page & Co.

THE four biographies which are here reviewed together may seem at first blush to have no natural connection justifying their consideration in one and the same article, but they have been thus grouped together because, published at the same time, they illustrate in a striking manner the extent to which men, all of whom must be regarded as representative or typical Americans, may nevertheless differ from one another as much as men possibly can differ, in origin, environment, character, career and achievement. If chance counts for anything in success they are only alike in having all been extremely lucky in life and all being Americans.

It is a far cry from George Washington, soldier, statesman and patriot, the foremost figure among the founders of this Republic, to Henry Ford, the millionaire Michigan manufacturer of motor cars, who is pronounced by his publishers to be the richest man in the world. In the conversations of John Burroughs we have the utterances of a notable lover of nature whose career more nearly exemplified "the simple life" than did that of any other American of his time; while the autobiography of Henry Morgenthau is an admirable portrait of an Americanized alien of the most desirable type.

I.

The reader who finds Mr. Thayer's "George Washington" prominently put forward among the more serious publications of the month is naturally prompted to ask: "Why are we offered a new life of Washington at this time?" The purpose of the publishers, as avowed on the folder inclosing the book, is to make it the definitive one volume biography of Washington. It is an octavo of 260 pages. The work which most nearly resembles it in style and makeup is Woodrow Wilson's "George Washington," 314 pages, published by Harper & Brothers in 1896. Mr. Thayer's object as expressed in his preface has been to give a sketch of George Washington's life and acts, which should disclose "the human residue" which he felt sure must persist in Washington's character. "No other great man in history," he says, "has had to live down such a mass of absurdities and deliberate false inventions," including the picture of an imaginary Father of His Country amusing himself with a fictitious cherry tree and hatchet. Although this rubbish has now been cleared away and there remains abundant authentic material for the use of biographers of Washington, many persons still complain that they cannot discern a flesh and blood Virginian in the George Washington of history. It is to help such readers that Mr. Thayer has written this book. In it he has conceived of Washington "as of some superb athlete equipped for every ordeal which life might cause him to face." The nature of each ordeal is briefly stated and then we are told how it was overcome. The author is justified in the confident hope that those who read this biography will no longer consider George Washington the most elusive of historic personages.

In attempting to classify American men of letters Mr. William Roscoe Thayer should properly be called an expert in biography. Not only has he written admirable biographies of Cavour, John Hay and Theodore Roosevelt, but he has expounded the principles of his calling in a small volume entitled "The Art of Biography," consisting of a series of lectures delivered at the University of Virginia and published by Scribners in 1920. In one of these lectures he says: "The essential subject of the biographer is the soul of man." This corresponds closely with the idea of Mr. Gamaliel Bradford, an accomplished contemporary expert in biography, and it may safely be inferred that the same view is entertained by Mr. Lytton Strachey, whose biographical essays have recently attracted so much favorable attention here and in England. Treating Washington's character, therefore, as the key to his greatness, Mr. Thayer has studied it with exceptional care, in order to present Washington as a man more clearly to the comprehension of the reader. The appearance of this biography is timely, if only to contradict the intimation by Mr. H. G. Wells in his outline of history to the effect that Washington was habitually an indolent man. Every American household in which there is any considerable collection of books at all ought to possess a "Life of Washington." Irving's monumental work in five volumes requires more shelf space than can be afforded in ordinary libraries nowadays; a one volume biography is essential. Mr. Thayer's book is just what was needed.

II.

The announcement in March, 1921, of the death of John Burroughs, in the eighty-fourth year of his age, brought a sense of profound regret to scores and hundreds of lovers of nature study throughout the United States. He had become the most popular writer of the day upon natural history in its more familiar aspects. The older readers who used to be enthusiastic over the writings of Thoreau became admirers of the books of John Burroughs, and others classed him with the school of nature lovers represented by John Muir. The widespread interest in the man and his writings makes the present time peculiarly appropriate for the publication of such a book as his artist friend, Mr. Clifton Johnson, has produced under the title of "John Burroughs Talks." Mr. Johnson's acquaintance with Burroughs arose out of his employment to illustrate two collections of his essays. The artist had long been an ardent worshiper of the author and he availed himself of the opportunities afforded by their many meetings to make careful notes of what Burroughs had to say on almost every subject under the sun. In his old age the venerable naturalist reminded the present writer of Rip Van Winkle, and he was quite as delightfully talkative. The notes taken by Mr. Johnson have been classified and arranged in this volume so as practically to constitute a tolerably complete autobiography of John Burroughs. The artist has sought to give a faithful report of the author's unconventional talk and thus furnish his admirers with a narrative of the chief events of his life, taken down from his own life. The outcome is an exceptionally interesting portrait of a remarkable character.

John Burroughs refused to regard himself as a naturalist, strictly speaking. He said he preferred to call himself a nature lover. The place which he occupies in American national biography was won, not so much by a scientific study of nature as by the writing of nature essays in which he recorded the observation of familiar facts concerning plants and animals which usually escape the notice of ordinary observers. He disapproved the women's colleges in which "they make a feature of learning about nature by dissecting cats." Nor had he much sympathy with those who go out to the fields deliberately to study nature. "They make a dead set at it for a little while and then return to their money making or to society and the fashions."

Without making any fuss or pretense about it, John Burroughs really lived "the simple life," which so many praise and so few practice. He did not care for money further than enough to enable him to live and maintain his family—a wife and child—in reasonable comfort. Aside from his work as an author his principal income producing pursuits were farming on a small scale and a clerkship for a period of ten years in the Treasury at Washington. After his popularity as a writer became established his publishers paid him an annuity in quarterly installments in addition to a royalty on the sales of each book during the first eight months after publication. This made his aggregate income about $3,500, and in 1915 he remarked that he did not spend all of it "by considerable."

John Burroughs was very proud of the acceptance by James Russell Lowell of the first contribution which he sent to the *Atlantic Monthly*—an Emersonian essay on "Expression," for which he received five dollars a page. His subsequent literary output fills nineteen 16mo. volumes, from "Wake Robin" to "Field and Study." Mr. Clifton Johnson's very entertaining book should be deemed an indispensable addendum to every set of his works.

III.

The interest which exists in the career of Henry Morgenthau, justifying the publication of an elaborate autobiography, may be explained in a single sentence. It is due to the fact that after having made a fortune he turned his attention to the broader aspects of politics, ardently and effectively supported Woodrow Wilson for the Presidency and was rewarded by the mission to Turkey, the duties of which he discharged in wartime with such conspicuous credit to himself as to win widespread approval from his countrymen in the land of his adoption.

Henry Morgenthau was born at Mannheim in the Grand Duchy of Baden in 1856. A good fairy must have presided over his birth, for the story of his life is a record of continuous success. His father was a prosperous cigar manufacturer, and the son came to America, not as a poor boy without prospects but as a well to do young man seeking a more promising field of endeavor than was afforded him in Germany. He studied law, was admitted to the New York bar and practiced law here twenty years, devoting more attention, however, to the business side of the profession than to work in court. He acquired special proficiency in buying and selling real estate, greatly to his own profit and the profit of those who were wise enough to act upon his advice. In this way he amassed a fortune, and then, at middle age, he turned aside from money making to realize, if possible, some of the ideals of his youth in ethics, music, social service, education and political life. Hundreds of rich men have formed plans to bring themselves happiness when they shall have acquired wealth, but usually by the time they have made money enough the desire or capacity to carry out those plans has passed away. It has not been so with Henry Morgenthau. Idealism has overcome materialism in the latter part of his life. His narrative of the resulting activities makes his autobiography peculiarly interesting to all serious students of the great problem of the United States as a melting pot for the incoming races of Europe. There would be no such problem if all immigrants were as capable of Americanization as Henry Morgenthau has proved himself to be. Pages could be filled with instructive quotations from his book, but limitations of space restrict us to a single extract from a prophetic speech made by Mr. Morgenthau to the American soldiers at Coblentz, when he visited their Liberty Hut there in 1919: "At present we are enjoying only a suspension of hostilities. Please don't go home and tell the people that this war is over. We have got to prepare for a greater conflict, a greater sacrifice, a greater responsibility. The young men of America will again have to fight. . . . The nations are going to have further quarrels and disputes. I believe that within fifteen years America will be called upon really to save the world."

There is much to commend in Mr. Morgenthau's book, but we hope that this prophecy is as mistaken as we believe it to be.

In his last chapter the author takes strong ground against the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine, declaring that Zionism is the most stupendous folly in Jewish history. "We Jews of America," he says, "have found America to be our Zion. Therefore, I refuse to allow myself to be called a Zionist. I am an American." With these words he ends the story of a useful life; full of valuable lessons not only to his racial compatriots, but to all who cherish a worthy ambition to rise in the world and at the same time be of service to their fellows.

IV.

Henry Ford of Michigan, the rich maker of the Ford automobile, has written an autobiography which differs as much as possible from that of Henry Morgenthau,

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